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"The American Committee for the Defense of British Homes"

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FROM THE COLLECTIONS:

“The American Committee for the Defense of British Homes”

THE MHS collection holds so many wonderful treasures that sometimes we, as staff, don't even know they exist until a researcher requests them. Recently, a researcher in Great Britain emailed to inquire about a very interesting collection called “The Committee for the Defense of British Homes” (Coll. S-5365). The staff here had not used it or seen it, but it was fully cataloged in our card catalog and on Minerva (the online catalog). The researcher, Martin Mace, contacted us after finding the collection listed in NUCMC (National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections), an online cataloging resource operated by the Library of Congress.

Martin Mace is writing a short book about the American Committee for the Defense of British Homes. He found some information about the Committee in English libraries, but found no other American collection as rich as the one at MHS. We were able to provide him with research material and additional detail for his book. In return, we gained a better understanding of Coll S-5365 and its importance to Maine history.

The American Committee for the Defense of British Homes was a national organization that collected weapons, stopwatches, helmets and other equipment for the British Home Guard during WWII. Local representatives collected donations from banks, prisons, hospitals and other large institutions. Even individuals donated old weapons from WWI. District Court Judge John A. Peters promised “to find the Colt automatic revolver that I acquired during the last World War. I remember it was a very effective and very wicked weapon. I will bring it back for you if I can find it.”

Brooks Whitehouse, a lawyer with the law firm Verrill Hale Dana and Walker in Portland, was the Maine coordinator. He took the volunteer post in January of 1941, and it seems this is when the Maine chapter came into existence. Whitehouse made personal appeals, placed adver-

The following announcement is sponsored by the
American Committee for the Defense of British Homes:-

Have you any rifles, shot guns, pistols, binoculars, steel helmets or stop watches? These articles are urgently needed by British civilians for the defense of their homes. All such articles sent or delivered to Norman Douglas, care of Edwards & Walker Co., Portland, Maine, will be forwarded to New York for immediate shipment to England. Help Britain stop Hitler now.

'T' COMPANY, 22ND SUSSEX (BATTLE) BATTALION, HOME GUARD

Brickwall,
Sedlescombe,
BATTLE, Sussex.

22nd July 1941.

Dear

Mr. Whitehouse

Your gift of a Springfield Rifle has been issued to my Home Guard Company, and I wish to express to you my sincere appreciation of this most friendly gesture to our country.

You may be sure that your rifle will be in good hands if the Hun invades this country, and I hope it will account for more than one of them.

My Company operates near the site of the Battle of Hastings, and is therefore in a likely invasion area in this war as it was in 1066.

Good care will be taken of your rifle, and every endeavour made to return it to you after the war.

Grateful thanks,

Yours

Sincere
Jack Keeling

(J.H. Keeling)
Major,

O.C., 'T' Company,
22nd Sussex (Battle) Bn. Home Guard.

Brookes Whitehouse, Esq.,
57, Exchange Street,
Portland, M.E.

DOWNSWAY,
THISTLEBARROW ROAD,
SALISBURY, WILTS.

20th August, 1941.

Dear Sir,

I am more than grateful to receive
your gift of Paragon D.B. Shotgun No.23855, and
I hope to put it to good use, given the
opportunity.

I would like to add how grateful we
in this country are to the people of America
for their great generosity, and we hope that
with your tools and our determination we shall
bring this War to a successful conclusion.

Yours truly,



Mr. Brooks Whitehouse,
Maine Committee,
57, Exchange Street,
PORTLAND, MAINE.

tisements in media all over Maine, and raised money to ship the weapons to New York. The Maine Legislature proposed a bill to allow game wardens to donate confiscated weapons to the Committee. The bill failed, but Whitehouse was able to raise money to purchase these guns. They were on sale (presumably to the public) at the State House, and Whitehouse purchased all of the serviceable weapons for the cause.

Once the weapons reached New York, the national office applied for an export license, and the weapons were sent to Britain for distribution among the Home Guard units. In January 1941 a Progress Bulletin reported that

Twenty-six cases of firearms, binoculars and steel helmets left the port of New York this week for England. This makes a total of 194 cases of such material which has been shipped by this Committee. The Committee has received to date:

1,810 guns
1,573 revolvers
846 binoculars
198,729 rounds of ammunition
1,887 steel helmets

The collection contains monthly updates and Progress Bulletins, as well as correspondence and thank-you letters from the British Home Guard. Most of the material is from 1941, and the entire collection is approximately 200 pages. Mr. Mace was able to access MHS collections using our Fee-based Research Service. This service allows long-distance researchers to utilize materials at Maine Historical Society and is available through our Web site (www.mainehistory.org). We look forward to receiving a copy of Mr. Mace's book and learning more about the American Committee for the Defense of British Homes.

STEPHANIE PHILBRICK